

Another glimpse into Dr M's letters

MalaysiaKini.com

May 16, 2015

By M Krishnamoorthy

'Dr Mahathir's Selected Letters to World Leaders', which will be launched on Monday, reveals some of the diplomatic banter involving the then prime minister during his 22 years at the helm.

One that stands out is Mahathir's Oct 3, 1998 response to former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher's query on the black eye sustained by his ousted deputy Anwar Ibrahim while in police custody.

In volume two of the book, he wrote: "Even if they (police) are stupid, the police would know that such evidence of police brutality would not do any good for them or for the case. The Malaysian government is against police brutality in this country or anywhere, but we must find out who the guilty person is.

"We cannot blame the whole police for something that may or may not have been done by one of their members. I have instituted an official enquiry and the culprit will be punished when the enquiry identifies him," Mahathir noted in the book.

In the beginning of the letter, he states: "I appreciate your concern over the alleged police brutality against Mr Anwar Ibrahim. I am concerned too. At this point in time, we are not sure as to how he came to have a black eye while in police custody.

"He has been detained before and so had many others, yet no one had been assaulted. Why did the police in this high-profile case, where the world's media is watching closely, inflict such visible injury and parade him before the world?

"He was free until the crowd he incited broke into our party (Umno) headquarters and then marched towards my residence with the intention of burning it. At that stage, the police arrested him for incitement to riot, breaking the peace and stopping people from going about their business."

Then police chief Abdul Rahim Noor was later charged and jailed for two months for assaulting Anwar.

Mahathir also replied to then British premier Tony Blair in a letter dated Oct 14, 1998; its contents were similar to his reply to Thatcher almost two weeks earlier.

'Remove roadblocks'

The body of correspondence featured in the book includes letters to then US president George W Bush, French leader Jacques Chirac, and the two British premiers.

In all, his writing was transparent, informative, and sometimes robust.

The book also featured correspondence with the late Singapore premier Lee Kuan Yew, who was straightforward on bilateral issues such as water supply, bridge, railway, land compensation, Central Provident Fund and airspace.

On the progress of negotiations between senior officials from Singapore and Malaysia, former prime minister Goh Chok Tong concluded in a letter dated April 11, 2002: "Should they run into roadblocks, I would be happy to meet you to help remove the blocks."

On the book cover is Perak Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah's capsule review: "A revealing ensemble of diplomatic letters worth reading."

A former Malaysian diplomat said: "Quite often, the diplomatic notes were written by Foreign Ministry division heads with some input from ambassadors in the respective countries.

"But Dr Mahathir sometimes wrote some letters on his own. Some of us learned his style and drafted letters to suit his preferences."

'Dr Mahathir's Selected Letters' is edited by Abdullah Ahmad, former New Straits Times editor-in-chief and Umno politician.

A former deputy minister and Malaysian envoy to the UN, Abdullah also wrote the book's introduction as well as a number of commentaries on bilateral issues, globalisation, war, and conflict.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/298531>